This course expands students’ knowledge of American literature and culture from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While many important figures of “high modernism” were Americans living abroad, this course primarily focuses on the literary developments within the American landscape itself. Following W. E. B. Du Bois’s famous prediction that the problem of the 20th Century would be the “color-line,” our readings pose challenging questions concerning difference and belonging. We will pay close attention to how individuals can be included and excluded in a national literature, and we will examine how American social realities are represented and contested using new aesthetic strategies during this period. Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, with its complex staging of the course themes, will serve as our primary case study. Across the term students will address the following questions: How does the United States produce a distinctive mythology of the individual? How does literature support or refute the so-called American dream, especially in times of crisis? And finally, how do modernist aesthetics and world historical events find unique expression in the American literary tradition?

**Core Texts**
- Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (9780140187649)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (0743273567)
- Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (0140481346)
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (0679732764)
- Course Reader (available in B1 of HSS)

**Course Assessment:**
- Preparation, Participation, and Presentations: 15%
- Character Analysis Essay: 10%
- Comparative Analysis Essay: 25%
- Examination: 50%

**Prospective Itinerary**

**Week 1 – What is an American?**
August 15 – *The Declaration of Independence*; Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”
*Citizen Kane* excerpt (in class)

*No Class – Hari Raya Haji*

**Week 2 – The Problem of the Individual**
August 29 – Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener;” Whitman and Dickinson, selected poetry
Week 3 – “The Problem of the Twentieth Century”

Week 4 – Post-War Nostalgia and the West as Prospect
September 12 – Cather, *My Ántonia* (3-191); Thomas Edison Studio films (in class)

Week 5 – Parallel Tracks and Locomotion
September 19 – Cather, *My Ántonia* (193-278); Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1-38); *The Great Train Robbery*, dir. Porter (online)

Week 6 – American Dreams
September 26 – Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (39-180); Glaspell, *Trifles* (in class)

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Week 7 – Coming of Age
October 10 – Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Education: 3-97)
Character Analysis Essay due (~750 words)

Week 8 – Moving to the City
October 17 – Ellison, *Invisible Man* (The City: 98-295); McKay and Hughes, selected poetry

Week 9 – Moving Images
October 24 – Stein, selected writings; *The Cameraman*, dir. Keaton (online); Okubo, selections from *Citizen 13660*

Week 10 – American Tragedy and Alternative Endings

Week 11 – The Personal, the Public, the Political
November 7 – *Citizen Kane*, dir. Welles
Comparative Analysis Essay Due (~1500 words)

Week 12 – The Ends of the Dream
November 14 – Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 5